

*Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, gave a speech in London last week in which he expressed the view that an additional 40,000 American troops should be deployed to the Afghan theater. The general's speech apparently angered Obama administration officials. The next day, President Obama summoned McChrystal to a meeting with him aboard Air Force One. James L. Jones, the national security advisor, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested later in separate news interviews that the general had stepped out of line by airing his views. "His recommendations to the president should go up the line of command. They shouldn't be in press conferences," Pelosi said. Do you agree?*

Conflicts between military commanders and presidents are not a new phenomenon in the history of the United States. During the Civil War, several generals publicly clashed with President Lincoln. The most notable, of course, was Gen. George B. McClellan, who went on to oppose Lincoln for reelection in 1864. The public disagreements between Gen. MacArthur and President Truman are the stuff of legend, as are the protestations of Gen. Patton during World War II. In all of these cases, the general was relieved of command. That is the prerogative of the commander in chief. But it is also the right — and obligation — of a commander in the field to aggressively support the strategy that they believe will accomplish the mission that they have been assigned, with the least loss of American blood and treasure as possible.

The president fired Army Gen. David McKiernan and replaced him with Gen. McChrystal. The president laid out a mission and objectives in March and asked the general to come up with a strategy to accomplish that. McChrystal did so, and is now under criticism for the recommendation he proffered at the president's request.

Obama has come under criticism within his party and support base over his Afghanistan policy announced in March. It now seems he is going to pivot on that policy. Rather than do so directly, it appears as though he may use McChrystal's proposal as a scapegoat to cover his own indecision about the best course in this war.

The skills and personality required to be a politician in a democracy are very different from those required to be a commander in the military. Those personalities have often come into conflict over centuries of war and politics. Our system, with a civilian commander in chief setting

policy for the military chain of command, while not perfect, is still the best system out there. But it doesn't mean that the two will never conflict.

That said, I have been very clear that the situation in Afghanistan is extremely challenging and the solutions are far from obvious. But the president needs to decide on a mission objective and then fully implement the policy to accomplish that objective to achieve the desired end state. He has not done so. This vacillation, indecision and weakness merely encourages our enemies and troubles our friends around the world.

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